

Polite Words in Japanese

Saying “Thanks”

Thanking someone in Japanese presents a number of syntactic choices, just as in English. We might casually say “thanks” to a friend, or “thank you” to a store clerk, or “thank you very much sir” to the professor who hands us our diploma. Similarly, the most casual form in Japanese is *arigato* (“thanks”). A semi-formal version would be *arigato gozaimásu*, the latter word being a semi-formal form of the word *aru*, simply meaning “there are”; the Japanese are uncomfortable saying the word for “you” because they consider it too forward, so, in place of saying “thank you” they actually say “there are thanks.” But the English equivalent would be “thank you.” “Very much” is *domo*, and therefore: *domo arigato*, (“thanks a lot” or “thanks very much”) or *domo arigato gozaimásu* (“thank you very much”). The most formal and respectful thanks utilizes the formal form of *aru*: *domo arigato gozaimashita* (“thank you very much, sir”). When Sensei finally hands you that black belt after years of mutual effort, this would be an appropriate expression of gratitude. [Note: the “u” in *gozaimásu* and the second “i” in *gozaimashita* are nearly silent.]

REMEMBER:

Arigato (Thanks)

Arigato gozaimásu (Thank you)

Domo arigato (Thanks very much)

Domo arigato gozaimásu (Thank you very much)

Domo arigato gozaimashita (Thank you very much, sir)

More Polite Words

Here are a few more polite expressions that may come in useful during karate training or around the dojo. Underlined letters are nearly silent. The macron (bar) above a letter means that the vowel sound is held for about twice the usual duration.

Dō itashimashite

(You’re welcome; not at all)

Omedetō gozaimasu

(Congratulations)

Dōzo

(Please do; go ahead; here you are)

Sumimasen

(Excuse me; pardon me; so sorry)

Kudasai

(Please give or do)

Shitsurei shimasu

(May I, without disturbing you?
(Good-bye [formal])

Words of Greeting

The common Japanese greetings are useful to know, even though karate people often utilize the martial arts greeting *oss* instead. The common forms used before about 10 a.m. are the informal *ohayo* (“morning greetings”) and the more formal *ohayo gozaimasu* (“there are morning greetings”). In English we just have “Good morning.”

The term used from about 10 a.m. to sundown is *konnichiwa*, equivalent to “Good day.” (*Konnichi* means “today.”) But for answering the telephone they would say *Moshi moshi* (“Hello”). The word for “tonight” is *konban*, so “Good evening” (used after sunset) is *konbanwa*. When taking your final leave of someone in the evening, however, you would instead say *sayonara* (“Good-bye”) or, more formally, *Shitsurei shimasu*.

Ohayō gozaimasu
(Good morning)

Konnichiwa
(Good day [used 10 a.m. to sundown])

Konbanwa
(Good evening)

Moshi moshi
(Hello [on the telephone])

Sayonara
(Good-bye [informal])

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